

Newsletter

Blissymbolics
Communication
Institute

November 1981 No. 25





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BLISSYMBOLICS COMMUNICATION INSTITUTE

The purpose of this Newsletter is to publish articles and news items concerning Blissymbolics which utilizes visual symbols as an augmentative to communication. The many applications of Blissymbolics include the following:

1. Communication Difficulties
2. Cognitive and Language Development
3. Reading
4. International Communication

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350 Rumsey Road
Toronto, Ontario
Canada, M4G 1R8

ARTICLES

Readers are encouraged to contribute letters and articles in order to share their symbol experiences. Write to:

BCI Newsletter
Mrs. Barbara Rush
Editor
64 Magnolia Drive
Hamilton, Ontario
Canada, L9C 5T2

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 Breithaupt
 Poem: Walking to Breithaupt

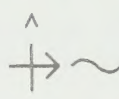


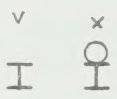

 Breithaupt
 I am walking to Breithaupt,





 10:30
 Be there by half past ten





 To swim with little children





 Whose bodies do not blend --







 Whose minds may never mend.







 But everyone of them is graced¹

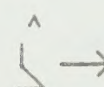








 With a heart² that's in its proper place.





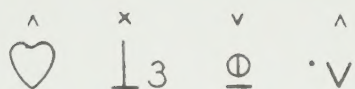
 Some crawl into the pool and stand



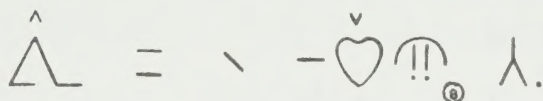




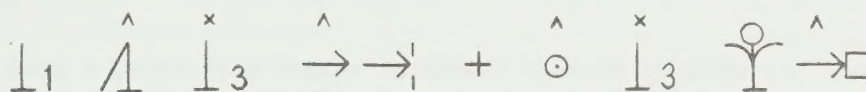
 And walk without a helping hand.



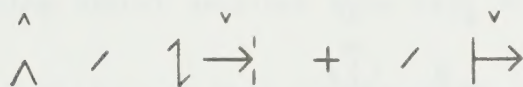
Feeling that they really can



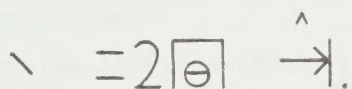
Walk as an ordinary man.



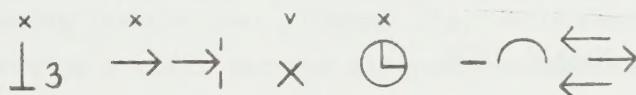
I help them try, and see them strain



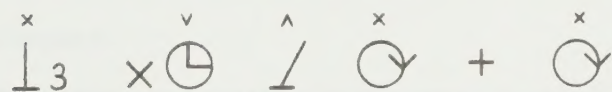
To do the simple and the plain --



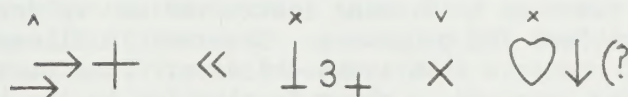
Any goal to attain.



Their efforts, many times in vain.



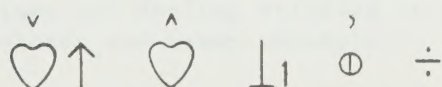
They often need years and years



To overcome their many fears.



I leave the pool so light of heart,



Glad to feel that I was part

$\vee$
 $> \setminus \text{I} \mapsto$

Of just a little start --

$\setminus \mapsto > \setminus \overset{\wedge}{\rightarrow} +$
 A beginning of a winning,

$\text{II} = \square > \overset{x}{\perp}_3 + \overset{\wedge}{\oplus}.$
 Independence in their living.

$+ \overset{\vee}{\odot} \square \overset{x}{\perp}_3 \overset{\wedge}{\uparrow}$
 And all the time they are giving

$/ \rightarrow \rightarrow^1 \overset{\wedge}{\oplus} \overset{x}{\perp}_3 + \div.$
 The effort is their part.

© Dona Massel 1978

(Dona is a mature student at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. She has been writing poetry for about four years and won two literary awards in 1980. Her involvement with retarded children stems from many years as a swimming instructor and volunteer in the Breithaupt Pool TMR programme. Interest in Blissymbolics developed out of contacts with these children. Dona states that, "My own creativity responds in sheer fascination to the intricate, creative nature of Blissymbolics.")

¹metaphor, touched by God

²metaphor, feeling

BLISSYMBOL SUMMER SCHOOL

By: R. Alan Currie
Director
Greater Victoria Society for
Alternative Communication
Victoria, B.C.

Funded in part from a grant from Summer Canada 81 Community Projects, the project ran for 18 weeks from May to August. Ten adults were involved whose multiple disabilities included:

cerebral palsy, hearing impairment and mental retardation.

The daily morning school sessions were held at Camosun, the local Community College.

1. The general purpose of this project was as follows:

- a. To provide an Educational setting for our symbol users which integrates symbols, signs (manual communication), and other forms of alternative communication.
- b. To provide individualized instruction for each student, at home as well as in the work setting. This is essential to provide a carry over of the academic and communicative goals of the school setting.
- c. To provide academic instruction to persons who are presently not receiving instruction; although they would benefit from such services.
- d. To provide a model for the alternate communication teaching mode.
- e. To expose students to various means of communication.
- f. To promote interaction amongst symbol users.

2. School Structure:

One major teaching approach was the use of total communication, speaking, signing, writing symbols and writing words. This method seemed to work well in that the students were exposed to many different communication forms which they began incorporating into their own main means of communication. Reinforcement of the total communication approach will enable them to increase their ability to be understood.

3. The school was organized around a thematic approach. These included:

1. Senses
2. Names and Group awareness
3. Figures of Speech and Idioms
4. Living situations and introduction to problem solving
5. Feelings and Emotions
6. Canada and Mapping
7. Emotions and Feeling relating to practical situations
8. The stores and money concepts

The themes that were covered were chosen to expand awareness and communication about these concepts. By organizing around a thematic approach the focus was centred and each student's weekly individualized group activities were related to the theme. A typical day consisted of:

1. Individual instruction
2. Large Group activities and Small Group activities

There were two types of group activities, those which centred on the theme for the week and those which concentrated on symbol review. The majority of group time was centred on the theme.

4. Some Sample Activities were:

1. To improve symbol reading:

a. Scavenger Hunt:

Send students on individual scavenger hunts. They read clues written in symbols and proceed to find a reward.

b. Store:

Set up a store in the classroom. The students are given a shopping list and go through the store picking up the appropriate items.

2. For Symbol Review:

a. Actions:

Select a list of about ten verbs and mime the actions that these verbs describe. The students are to name the actions using their symbols. For example - eat, drink and sleep.

b. Packing a Suitcase:

Ask students to name all the things they would pack in a suitcase if they were going away for a weekend.

3. Practical Communication:

a. Practical Situations:

These provided an opportunity for symbol users to practise communication about situations they may come across and need to discuss with care workers.

In general responses included:

1. Getting care worker's attention
2. Each student saying what he would do if - example
 - You want to talk to someone and they walk away.
 - Someone is bothering you.
 - You're supposed to go out on the bus and you get left behind.

G.V.S.A.C. Instructors involved in the project were:

Denise Chow, a 4th year education student at University of Victoria.

Ann Macgregor, a 3rd year University of Victoria Student, who plans to be a speech therapist.

Carol Walton, a 4th year student who already has a Teaching Certificate and plans further education at University of British Columbia and a career working with the deaf and hard of hearing.

Note: Carol and Denise have worked in previous terms with us and were instrumental in the initiation and success of the project. Please write to their attention, c/o BCI Newsletter, if you wish any further information.

BLISSYMBOLICS IN THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION

By: Karen Brown
Smiths Falls, Ontario.

(Karen is the Blissymbolics Instructor at Rideau Regional Centre in Smiths Falls serving approximately 40 Bliss clients. The following is extracted from a paper she wrote for her Honours Communication Degree)

Each person lives in a community with fellow human beings. The community is "composed of persons who are predominately socialized".¹ To function effectively at a social level, one must communicate with others. Communication enables the individual "to impart, to share, to make common one's thoughts, feelings and questions".² Communication binds people together in a mutually-supportive social setting. People who are unable to communicate are looked upon as fringe members of the community and have little interaction with other members.

Children who cannot communicate do not have opportunities for individual, socialized development and become passive recipients of care. Without challenging and satisfying interaction with others, they do not exhibit the behaviour patterns of socialized children. They increasingly lack interest in being understood. Thus, they do not address the listener, consider his point of view, try to influence him, or actually exchange ideas. Personality remains immature with continued childlike dependence and egocentricity.

¹ McDonald, Eugene T. Teaching and Using Blissymbolics (Toronto, Blissymbolics Communication Institute, 1980), p. 10

² McDonald, p. 10

Most communication takes place through listening and speaking, and through writing and reading verbal language. However, due to disabilities or disorders, some individuals cannot carry out these basic functions either as single actions or as groups of actions. Some cannot hear speech; some cannot understand it; others can hear and understand it, but cannot produce intelligible speech. Physically handicapping conditions, such as those resulting from cerebral palsy, may render writing impossible or, at best, laborious and frustrating. Still others cannot assimilate and generalize components of the sound systems on which oral language is based and so cannot learn to speak, read and/or write accurately. For those persons, verbal language systems as used in oral and print traditions are impossible. For them, an alternate form of communication can facilitate communicative exchange. This, in turn, promotes cognitive, social and emotional growth and results in maturation and more fully-functioning, social individuals.

Charles K³ Bliss has designed what he regards as a "complete pictorial symbol language" which serves as an alternative or augmentive system. These pictorial symbols are produced on a board. By pointing to the symbols, messages are transmitted without recourse to verbal abilities. This language system has become known as Blissymbolics.

The pictorial symbols of Blissymbolics have properties both similar to, and different from, verbal symbols. In both, the symbol represents meaning. No symbol is self explanatory; the meaning must be learned. Each system has a structure which must be assimilated and used to aid understanding.

Many characteristics of a pictorial system simplify the communicative process. Firstly, many symbols resemble the real object, although in a stylistic way. For example, "walk" is represented by depicting legs in motion with an action symbol over them; "chair" is represented by depicting the chair parts. Secondly, abstract ideas are associated with body parts and experience. All emotions incorporate the heart symbol. The outline of the skull is used for such concepts as mind, think, knowledge and so on. A dot in a square represents the concept "in". Thirdly, colour coding categorizes symbols into components representing person, thing, action, modifier, time, question form, and relationship such as homonym, antonym, metaphor and numeral. Further, the symbol is represented outside the communicator. It does not need to be recalled and produced but merely associated with and pointed out. This facilitates expression. If the receiver already has verbal language, comprehension occurs readily as the printed words are also provided on the Bliss Board.

Arbitrary symbols are used for concepts for which "there is no pictorial relationship between the form and what they are intended to symbolize".⁴ These include "a", "the", "that", "this", "which", and other such words. These are represented by lines, dots, dashes and quotation marks which can be easily learned by more able persons intellectually, but unnecessary for lower functioning individuals, whose communicative needs are more basic.

³ McDonald, p. 20

⁴ McDonald, p. 21

Some symbols enjoy international recognition and use. These include directional arrows, numerals, punctuation marks, money and mathematical symbols, medical symbols and also universally experienced phenomena such as sun, moon and star.

In comparison, this pictorial symbol system remains much less complex than the traditional verbal system and so more easily learned. In pictorial language, only one association is necessary - the pictorial with the meaning. This is made even easier when the pictograph incorporates aspects of meaning. In verbal language, the sound of the word incorporates no meaning except that prescribed to it arbitrarily. Further, in order to read and write a word, there must be association between the sound of the word and the printed letter symbols which are also arbitrary. Even in this sound-letter association, inconsistencies occur. The same sounds may be represented by different letters such as "ph" and "f" or different sounds by the same letters such as the "k" and "s" sounds represented by "c" in varying contexts. Written language is further complicated in that it can be either in cursive form or manuscript form. Thus, for those who find symbolization difficult, Blissymbolics offers a less arbitrary system with fewer associations and referenced more to meaning than does verbal communication.

For the deaf and mute, sign language utilizing hand movements, provides an alternate form of communication. However, its use is limited to interaction with other people trained in its use. The Blissboard can be used to communicate with the population untrained in Blissymbolics. As well, Bliss provided an alternative for those who cannot understand or use sign language.

Although, the communicator usually points out the message with his/her finger, it is possible to use the fist, a pointer attached to the head, or with eye movement. For persons for whom fine pointing movement is difficult, a scanner can be used to explore the board, until the chosen symbols are specified. For the blind, symbols may be learned by location, or may be raised as in Braille. If location is used or touch discrimination is poor, a voice synthesizer can produce the word to check that the desired symbol has been designated.

Even though Blissymbolics offer advantages, its use involves limitations as well. Some are inherent in the system and others result from the nature of the society or the individual. Primarily, because its use is not wide spread, non-users often ignore those who need it and they are left isolated. People who have grown up to communicate verbally often don't want to put forth the effort to do so in a different way. In mass communication, such as television, popular periodicals and newspapers, no Blissymbolics are used. For immediate, distant communication, only letters are available. No device can substitute for the telephone service available to verbal users including the deaf or blind.

For users, a board or device must be carried with them and available. This entails inconvenience to a greater or lesser extent. This inconvenience is not only physical but includes psychological ramifications. Being different makes acceptance of self more difficult at any time. To make this difference obvious by carrying the support, can be detrimental to the extent that the user would choose not to communicate rather than to make his disability obvious. This becomes most likely in the adolescent period when self identity is being re-established and the ego is most vulnerable.

The meaning base of the symbols used simplifies the learning process for two groups of disadvantaged whether they use the system in isolation or as a supplement to the verbal system. The symbols used are much more easily learned than a complex alphabet code, comprised of abstract symbols and requiring arbitrarily founded associations. The intellectually disadvantaged who are not capable of high level abstraction can use the concrete representation to aid comprehension and expression. The perceptually handicapped can use meaning to choose correct symbols and can avoid the confusions in letter reversals, sequences, substitutions and omissions which make their writing meaningless and their reading a jumble.

It becomes apparent that Blissymbolics has had little effect as a commonly universal language. In fact, many people remain unaware of Blissymbolics even as an alternative language system. However, this is understandable; Charles Bliss's first publication, Semantography, appeared only in 1949. Further, Blissymbolics for the handicapped started to be used in Canada only in 1971. As more become aware of it and its advantages, its value will probably become more recognized and its use increased. This is especially so as the rights and opportunities of the handicapped continue to be publicized and emphasized. Bliss, although relatively unimportant for the majority of people involved with mass media, can be crucial for the minority who have it as their only means of communication. For these reasons, its study has a place in the broad study of communication.

LANGUAGE INTERVENTION FOR NONVOCAL CHILDREN:

PRAGMATIC CONSIDERATIONS - PART 1

By: Janice C. Light
Ottawa, Ontario.

(Janice has been teaching children with severe communication disorders for the past three years. She is currently studying and researching communication and language disorders at OISE at the graduate level)

Much of our past and current intervention with nonvocal children concentrates on the semantics (content) and syntax (form) of language. Our programs are designed to encourage the children to develop cognitive concepts so that they have something to communicate and to provide symbol systems so that they have a means to communicate. We discuss the pros and cons of various symbol systems in the light of the child's needs; we work concertedly to develop his/her vocabulary and syntax and to provide efficient means of accessing symbols. However, while syntax and semantics are inarguably of the utmost importance in program design, they do not constitute the sole criteria for success and/or practicality.

If the essence of communication is the exchange of information, thought or feeling between two individuals, then we must ensure that our intervention programs define communicative interaction as their principal goal. We must ensure that the nonvocal child has the opportunity (time and space) to use language to communicate with a wide range of people (adults and peers, familiar and unfamiliar). We must also see that the nonvocal child is motivated to communicate - that the child experiences active participation within the environment, has the opportunity to cause and control.

Our model of language intervention must address not only the child's development of increasingly complex semantic and syntactic structure, but also the development of a greater breadth of communicative function. Halliday (1975) outlines the following pragmatic functions:

1. instrumentals (expressions of needs, wants)
2. regulatives (attempts to regulate the actions of others)
3. interactionals (establishment of social bonds)
4. personals (self-expression)
5. heuristics (information seeking)
6. imaginatives (make believe)
7. informatives (information giving)

Too frequently, the nonvocal child's repertoire of communicative functions is severely restricted. Too often, the Bliss board is a vehicle through which the child is able to express basic needs and wants, but little else. The Bliss board is often used as a vehicle through which the child, in an artificial situation, responds to "test" questions (to which we already know the answers); no actual exchange of information, hence no communication, occurs.

Every attempt must be made, through environmental intervention, to expand the range of the nonvocal child's pragmatic intent. As mediators, we must model the full range of communicative functions and must allow the child, in naturally occurring situations, to experience the power of communication and its intrinsic reinforcement. Communication boards and symbol systems provide a means for the nonvocal child to communicate, but they do not guarantee the interactive behaviour requisite to true communication. It is our responsibility as mediators to ensure that we facilitate communicative interaction with the nonvocal child in the course of our daily lives.

In order to facilitate the process of communication, we must carefully consider not only the child's language, but also our own language, as well as how we interact with the child. In other words, we must consider the environmental context of the child's language. The nonvocal child's lack of verbal responsiveness, or his or her inappropriate, unclear or repetitive verbal responses, might have a profound effect on our pattern of communicative interaction with the child. As mediators, we are continually faced with the child's failure to respond verbally, or with inappropriate or slow responses. We attempt to repair the flow of conversation and in the process often develop a pattern of interaction that relies heavily on questions (to which only a yes or no answer is required) and on directives (to which only a physical response is required of the child). Our overuse of questions and directives, as well as our anticipation of the child's needs and wants, ultimately serve to inhibit the child's responsiveness. All in all, we neither expect nor require much of the nonvocal child.

In order to break the "traditional" pattern of interaction with the nonvocal child, we must direct special attention to our own communicative strategies so that they not only maintain the child's current skills, but also serve to further develop the child's communicative competence. We must incorporate techniques of expansion, extension, conversational comment, self talk, parallel talk, clarification questions, silence and so on into our daily interactions with the child. Above all, we must be responsive to the child and must capitalize on interaction initiated by the child, especially since it is at these times that the child is most attentive and motivated.

We must make an effort to reduce our dominance in conversation. The child must be encouraged and expected to initiate conversation - to pose questions, to disagree, to engage in dialogue. Communication ought to be a process of mutual responsibility, not a one-sided "mediator-dominated" affair. As mediators, we must develop a tolerance for silence and the patience to wait for the child to take his or her turn in conversational exchange.

Our intervention must serve to develop the child's skills in conversational conventions. As mediators, we must give careful thought to these conventions. How does the nonvocal, physically handicapped child interrupt a conversation? How does such a child initiate dialogue? In what manner is intensity of emotion, humour, or sarcasm conveyed? What happens to conversational interchange when both parties are attending to the Bliss board and there is no eye contact? What happens to the child who is expected to develop competence with a Bliss board with experiencing diverse models of others who are communicating in the same mode? What are the effects on communication when one of the participants is unable to generate symbols and must work from a closed set?

Blissymbols have opened up new possibilities for nonvocal children. In the years since their initial application with the physically handicapped, we have made much progress in examining the semantics and syntax of Blissymbols, in developing a basic vocabulary of symbols, in discovering more efficient and diverse ways of accessing the symbols, and in structuring the Bliss boards to facilitate the acquisition of syntax. Now it is time to direct our attention just as concertedly to the pragmatics of Blissymbols. It is important that our nonvocal children not only "know" the symbols, but also have the opportunity to use them in daily communicative interaction.

References

Halliday, M. Learning How to Mean Elsevier North-Holland Inc., New York, 1975.

INITIAL BLISSYMBOL LEXICONS

By: Cathy Perlich

(Cathy is an ex-symbol teacher, now studying language and communication at an American University. The following is extracted from one of her university projects)

Professionals must address themselves not only to the issue of what symbols to teach first, but also what symbols are appropriate for the child's age level, cognitive functioning, environment, and physical abilities (including visual and perceptual skills). Also, these first symbols should lend themselves to expansion, i.e., semantic relationships as the child becomes adept at utilizing his symbols and as he matures linguistically. Although Blissymbol displays may be devised with varying formats, most instructors agree that an organization that encourages left to right progression in pointing due to its equivalence to written English sentence structure is best.

The BCI has put out a "Guide for the Users of Blissymbol Stamps" (1979) with a suggested organization of Blissymbol stamps. They have also vaguely answered the question "What symbols should I select?" in their Handbook of Blissymbolics (Silverman et al., 1978).

This paper will review these suggested guidelines for symbol selection and teaching procedures in an attempt to ascertain how well these recommended symbols correlate to what we know about normal language development.

The BCI suggests the selection of: "symbols that are appropriate to the child's needs and capabilities; symbols which are visually similar to what they represent; symbols a child can readily 'talk' about and use; symbols requested by the child; body parts; symbols recommended by the immediate family; symbols representing basic concepts; greetings; symbols selected with careful consideration given to a child's visual-perceptual skills; and symbols from the Basic Thirty Symbol Vocabulary which are visually most dissimilar from each other".

These thirty Blissymbols are listed below:

no
yes
happy
sad

toilet
animal
food
drink
house

I
man
father
brother

you
woman
mother
sister

want
like
wash
what

hello
goodbye
angry
big
little

mouth
eye
legs
hand

The Blissymbols will be critiqued for suitability for a low-functioning, physically handicapped individual, specifically the cerebral palsied child. They will be discussed from a semantic development viewpoint based partly on ideas for beginning lexicons of normal children (Holland, 1975; Lahey & Bloom, 1977) and partly on a sign lexicon for severely communicatively impaired children (Fristoe & Lloyd, 1980). Many more of the ideas have evolved from practical experience with Blissymbol users; creating personalized symbol boards for them, teaching them, and most of all learning from them.

To commence, YES and NO are included in the Basic Thirty Vocabulary. But, insofar as many symbol instructors consider that the establishment of a clear YES/NO response is a prerequisite of beginning symbol instruction, they have been left out of the actual teaching strategies. These symbols are often optional on a symbol display, depending on the degree of a child's motor involvement, e.g., the child may be able to nod his head for YES. NO has more communicative functions and will be dealt with first.

Lahey and Bloom (1977) dichotomized words used by young children into substantive words, "those words that refer to particular objects or categories of objects", and relational words, "words that refer to a relationship between objects". NO, then, can be classified as a relational word as it may code the nonexistence of an object as well as to reject objects and to deny situational utterances (e.g., A: "Is that your doll?" C: "No."). All of these negations occur in the single-word utterance stage of development (Bloom & Lahey, 1978) and thus NO may be applicable to the first thirty words on a Blissboard.

YES, on the other hand, only serves to affirm the truth of a statement or to respond to a YES/NO question. The inclusion of YES in a speaking child's first lexicon may be questionable. But, for nonverbal children, YES may be used as an item to signify existence. Whereas a speaking child might code the existence of an object by labelling it, a symbol user, with a limited number of object symbols, might in fact point to YES if the desired symbol was not present on his symbol board.

The BCI proposes that one begin with two visually dissimilar symbols, i.e., HAPPY and SAD. The logic behind this choice is that; (a) the heart is a conventional cue; (b) the "arrow" component shows a dissimilarity through directional difference, and (c) HAPPY and SAD are concepts that are most familiar to a child since he has probably experienced these emotions. However, the Blissymbols for HAPPY and SAD are not as dissimilar as one would be led to believe. Both of these symbols contain exactly the same components: a heart, an "arrow" or directional indicator, and a symbol that defines them as being in the evaluative category. The only visual difference is that one arrow points up and the other down. This orientation may not help a child to distinguish the symbols, especially if he has not yet developed good perceptual and directional concepts. It is a fair assumption that these emotions have been experienced by the child, and that these emotions do have an observable link (Lahey & Bloom, 1977), i.e., the smile that accompanies HAPPY suggests that they would be suitable symbol board items. Still, due to their similarity in composition and that they are attributive (refer to internal states), teaching them; (a) as a pair, and (b) at the same time might confuse a child. Instead, just one of these adjectives, perhaps the more positive one, HAPPY, may be taught first, with SAD being coded by the combination of NO (negation) plus HAPPY.

Next, two more symbols are added, most typically those that are pictographic. For instance, TOILET and ANIMAL might be chosen due to their transparent forms which can easily be associated with other objects that are thought to be directly associated with a child's environment. These object symbols include FOOD, DRINK, and HOUSE. Also, by pointing to the objects that they represent, a child may see how a Blissymbol can be used to manipulate his environment.

The nominal category represents approximately 63% of the first 50 words produced by normal children (Nelson, 1973). The percentage of Blissymbols (of the basic 30) that are nominals is a comparatively similar 51%. However, in contrast, within Nelson's general nominal category, objects comprise 31% whereas they only comprise 16% of total Bliss nominals. This suggests room for expansion in the object category. How do these nominals stand up in terms of lexical suitability? For example, as contrasted with vital objects like FOOD or TOILET, the symbol for HOUSE may not be necessary. It is akin to Nelson's rationale (1973) for not teaching FURNITURE; that is, that HOUSE is a static part of the environment that a child can't act on. Even FOOD and DRINK might be too general since they code a lot of different items. For instance, when a caregiver is trying to decide what the child wants to drink, she can quite easily go through a process of elimination (i.e., "Do you want milk? water? juice?, etc.). But trying to figure out what a nonverbal child wants for breakfast and then what specific type of cereal he is trying to indicate is a long and arduous task. For this reason, the addition of a few favorite food items (i.e., McDonald hamburgers) might be considered. Holland (1975) believes also that a favorite food name has "natural contingency possibilities," another reason for inclusion of a specific food item in addition to the generic FOOD.

Other favorite or common objects (unrelated to food) might be added to the symbol board. For instance, Fristoe and Lloyd (1980) recommended the addition of the sign for TV in their initial lexicon. TV is a common object, and one the handicapped child is quite familiar with (often unfortunately because of his confinement), and one might argue that viewing a television is acting on it.

In the teaching realm the BCI continues introduction of objects, especially body parts: mouth, eye, legs, hand; again, because they are visually related to a person's actual body parts and they provide a smooth transition into the concept of actions. It is thought that since many symbol users are confined to wheelchairs (and they often don't move) they have difficulty in the comprehension of actions or verbs.

There is a general trend, among language pathologists, away from teaching body parts because they are not common conversational referents and they therefore appear to have limited usefulness in beginning language learning. Their relative importance to normal language acquisition may be evidenced by the lack of "body part" research. The Blissymbol instructor strategy of moving from body parts to verbs has been reportedly successful. So, until further investigation either proves or disproves this hypothesis, retaining these items would be a matter of personal preference.

The pronouns are eight in number. They include: I (or me), YOU, MAN, WOMAN, FATHER, MOTHER, BROTHER and SISTER. These are "people" that a child has in his environment and whom he would most like to "talk" about or to. To teach this concept, the symbols can be transformed through a drawing or a cartoon (Symbol Boy, BCI film*) into more "people like" figures, i.e., by the addition of a head, feet, etc. By making the symbols more lifelike, it was thought that eight was not an insurmountable number to learn.

At a very early age, it appears that children can recognize their caregivers, and the words "mama" and "dada" are frequently reported by parents to be among the first in a child's spoken repertoire. It has been suggested (Greenfield, 1973) that the acquisition of words is shaped by the environment. Surely, then, there is a need for symbols to express the ideas of mother and father. These two symbols do in fact appear in the First Thirty Symbol Vocabulary. MOTHER and FATHER are pictographic in that they depict and relate to the meaning that they represent. Indeed, Blissymbols in general may have an advantage over the written word because they are not as abstract. However, if it is concreteness that we are looking for, why not simply add pictures of the child's family to his symbol board? Perhaps, based on this same rationale, we should even add a picture of the child himself as it would be more representative of the concept of "I".

The inclusion of YOU may be postponed until a later stage of linguistic development, as pronominal reference doesn't occur until 4 years of age (Maratsos, 1973). When a child is talking to another person and says, "go", the "you" is implicit in his command.

MAN and WOMAN would be excluded for reasons of personal preference. As MAN is interpreted as "person of action" and WOMAN as "person of creation", these concepts I feel promote sex-role stereotyping and therefore could better be represented by PERSON or FRIEND.

The first verb after the action strategy has been acquired is the verb "to want". With the knowledge of this verb, it is felt that the child can have his needs met and can also begin to compose simple sentences, such as, "I want food". The subsequent verbs which are included in the Basic Thirty Symbols are "like" and "wash". They are to be taught at this stage because, simply, they are also verbs. Normal children are more apt to act on an object and then name the object (MacNamara, 1972). Thus, action words rarely constitute more than a quarter of the normal child's productive vocabulary (Benedict, 1979). But for a nonverbal, physically handicapped child who does not move much, and who does not "produce" words, it is difficult to perceive just how much, he does comprehend and what actions might facilitate this comprehension. For the most part all that we can do is examine which action words researchers have deemed appropriate for normal language development and hope that there is some parallel to language acquisition by the handicapped. For the purpose of selecting action words for a handicapped child, it seems more appropriate to include those actions which he can observe and those which can effect some change in his environment.

* Available from: G. Lynes, National Film Board of Canada,
550 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec, CANADA.

WANT, the first verb in the action category of a Basic Thirty Symbol Blissboard, may be used in requesting objects or requesting more of something. But since MORE is such a commonly occurring item in previously devised initial word and sign lexicons (Lahey & Bloom, 1977; Fristoe & Lloyd, 1980), it would be interesting to add to the first thirty symbols, if only to see how often it is used to code recurrence in relation to WANT. To this point, all of Bloom and Lahey's (1978) semantic categories have been covered by Blissymbols, with the exception of "existence". Existence is most commonly represented in a child's speech by the use of "this" or "that". Both of these symbols are visually nondescript (a slash and a dot). It may therefore be less confusing for a child if we leave them out altogether because of their arbitrary nature. LIKE is not the best verb to include because it codes an internal state rather than an observable action. Holland (1975) suggested teaching the word KISS as an alternative with the rationale that it is easier to code the manifestations of internal states than to teach forms that attempt to code the state itself. While KISS is a tangible demonstration of LIKE or LOVE, a Bliss user should be able to apply his symbols to a wide array of people and events. And, for use with a wide variety of people, perhaps HUG would be a more appropriate substitution for LIKE than KISS since there are some social constraints on whom and where one kisses.

WASH is an observable action and it may even be one of the routines that the handicapped child is involved with during the day (other than eating, which can be expressed by ACTION strategy plus FOOD). GO can be used as a substitute for many more specific verbs of motion, such as "move", "turn", and "work". "Go" serves accurately as an all-purpose verb for young children who have not yet acquired more specific verbs" (Richards, 1979). In the hierarchy of verb importance, GO might be added and taught early on.

Once the child is combining symbols to make simple sentences, it is with the mere addition of the "question" symbol (?) that he can turn a statement into a question using a Bliss syntax model. So, for example, "You like house" can be turned into "You like house?" by just pointing to the question symbol before the pronoun.

In Silverman, Kates and McNaughton's (1978) evaluation of vocabulary usage, the least used category was that of questions. They suggest that the reason for this low usage frequency is that this category relies on the symbol user to initiate communication. A major obstacle when working with the nonverbal child who is beginning a Bliss program is to get him to a point where he can see that this communication system (Blissymbols) can be used to manipulate his environment. Often the nonverbal handicapped child assumes a passive role in communication which has some foundation both in his relative inability to move about and also the amount of physical assistance he requires by a caregiver. These caregivers are extremely alert to every need a handicapped child may have, so there is no need for the child to make more than a gesture that signals the caregiver that he is upset in some way.

The actual use of question words (i.e., how, when, why, etc.) by a normal child doesn't occur until somewhere between 2 and 6 years of age (Tyack & Ingram, 1977; Valian & Caplan, 1979). If we follow the developmental order as postulated by Crosby (1976), where the normal child first uses rising intonation to ask a question and next uses subject inversion before he uses an actual question word, we may expect that a symbol user would point to a symbol (i.e., ANIMAL) in the context (and perhaps with an added facial gesture) and we would be able to discern that he was asking a question.

Where the symbols HELLO/GOODBYE, BIG, LITTLE, and ANGRY are taught, I would assume is optional due to their lack of mention. It is possible that perhaps HELLO/GOODBYE was not referred to because different instructors would introduce it at different times depending on personal priorities. The remaining symbols, too, may possibly be added at a time when the setting was opportune (from an educational standpoint).

Of these remaining symbols, ANGRY is a good candidate for deletion based on the same rationale as LIKE (i.e., that it codes an internal state). And, also, in terms of the elements in this symbol (an "X", a heart and two "greater than" symbols which are translated as "much feeling against"), they are very abstract concepts that a child would certainly have difficulty in relating to (e.g., an angry face or an argument).

BIG and LITTLE are polar adjectives; they are also visually similar Blissymbols. Due to their similarity and the fact that they are often referred to in the same context, they are subject to what most easily can be thought of as the "Starsky and Hutch Phenomenon" where one can never distinguish who is Starsky and who is Hutch. For this reason, just one member of the pair should be taught first. Clark (1972) discovered that children tend to learn the "unmarked" member first: that is, the adjective that has both a general and a specific meaning. Since BIG can be equated with the qualities of "fatness", height, and thickness, it would be advisable to retain BIG and introduce LITTLE at a later time.

We have thus far discussed Blissymbols in terms of semantic development. For this remaining element (HELLO/GOODBYE) let us briefly touch on the area of pragmatics and four of Halliday's (1975) communicative functions. The functions seem to be served by children's vocalizations prior to their first word, namely the Instrumental, Regulatory, Interactional, and Personal Functions. In this Blissymbol system, HELLO/GOODBYE is considered one element, much like the word ALOHA in Hawaiian. In Halliday's identified communication functions, HELLO/GOODBYE would be listed as an interactional function. It is as important for a physically handicapped child to have a conversation "opener" as a nonhandicapped child, perhaps even more important, since they often have no way of getting attention from a caregiver other than by demonstrating "physical distress" (i.e., spastic movements). This contrasts dramatically with the normal child who is free to choose whomever and whenever he would like to interact by his use of advanced illocutionary behaviours. On more recently devised Blissboards, one may see the words, "Hello, my name is _____. I am a Blissymbol user who points with my _____". This practice definitely seems to aid in the

public's awareness. Holland (1975) also suggests that the inclusion of the child's own name is essential for self-esteem; and integral part of development in general. For the most part, though, the physically handicapped child is an observer. And, as a passive observer he should be given ways of controlling his environment with some immediacy. He therefore may require a symbol such as HELP, a "regulatory function" that would be highly distinguishable from his other symbols, possibly by means of enlargement or color-coding and positioning on his board for easy access. The verb WANT may also serve this "regulatory function". WANT also may characterize the "instrumentation function" (where an object is requested to satisfy a physical need, as mentioned earlier). Halliday's fourth function, the "personal function", again has to do with the child as a passive observer. As such, it is thought that the child needs ways of describing his delight with a situation. HAPPY, or even YES, might be used for this positive expression, or one might even add the "positive evaluation" symbol which has no corresponding word and can mean anything the child wishes it to mean. The idiosyncratic nature of this symbol serves to make it very "personal" indeed.

Regarding an order for teaching these symbols, after specific criterion for communication abilities had been met (which may include a clear yes/no response), I, personally, would:

1. reinforce NO
2. point out the placement on his board of his caregivers
3. demonstrate the use of HELP
4. teach general object symbols beginning with those symbols that are most pictographic (e.g., recent studies, i.e., Lloyd and Fristoe, 1978, have reported that "transparency or guessability may be used to increase the chances of success in early training")
5. teach action symbols, specifically WANT and GO (with possibly the body parts next, but I'm still not certain of where they fit in)
6. teach MINE, the possession symbol
7. introduce HELLO/GOODBYE and "YUK!" at any of the above stages (when they seem appropriate for coding the child's behaviour)
8. introduce BIG and HAPPY only after the child was using his symbol board to frequently "talk" about objects

Let me also reiterate that this is merely a proposal, subject to revision when more is known about the communicative abilities of the nonverbal physically handicapped. And, most importantly, any or all of the above should be modified to suit each individual symbol user's needs.

attention oii	danger Δ!	intensity !	minus, without -	(to) worry ^←→	zoo ♂↑w	coffee ☉	garbage can ♂	idea ↑	residential institution ΔxL
question [?]	king ΛΛΛ	volunteer LΛΛ	(to) agree ^→	(to) understand ^→	self-control ~→	brain □	generalization ♀	egg —⊙⊕	head ⊕
much, many v x	boss T~→Λ	worker LΛ	(to) decide ^→	(to) excuse ^→	(to) yawn ^○□	business ♂	plan, method Λ	problem [?]	schedule ⊙
what thing ?□	adult Λ→Λ	child Λ	(to) govern ^~→T	(to) approve ^V+!	stupid ^1	discussion ○→	My Special Blissymbols		
Dear...	team xLΛ +L	group xL	(to) lead, guide ^~→	(to) organize, arrange ^Δx□	tired ^V	office □Λ/	command !	nonsense! ⊗!	expensive ^x⊗x□
because b?	we, us xL	they, them xL3	(to) protest ^O«	too much ^~x	necessary ^/	frustration ♡→←	power ♡-!	alcoholic drink ΛOH	
maybe Φ?	that /	my, mine L1+	(to) regret ^♡(↑>)	best ^♡+!	quiet ^~!	opposition «	nut ↑	no —	
My name is Elaine Heaton (Sir). When I raise my little finger, you jump!									
			(to) try ^→	considerate ^B	specific ^/	suggestion ⊙»	yes —		

BLISSYMBOLICS FOR ADMINISTRATORS!

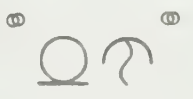
By: Elaine M. Heaton
Edmonton, Alberta

Six years ago the speech pathologists working at the Glenrose Hospital in Edmonton started using Blissymbolics with some of their non-speech patients. During this time many changes have been seen in the complexity of the boards which have been designed. The most complex board, in terms of vocabulary, so far developed is shown here. It was designed by JoAnne Mahood and presented to Elaine Heaton in October 1980. As you will see, much of the the vocabulary chosen would seldom be used for patients with emerging language!

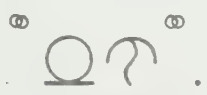
This board was presented to the newly appointed director of the department of speech pathology at the Glenrose. For the previous decade, the recipient had been employed as the supervisor of the speech pathologists working in the multiply handicapped children's program at Glenrose School Hospital.

When the board was presented to her, the recipient remarked that the choice of vocabulary, and indeed the periodic need for an alternate system of communication, reflected the staff's depth of understanding of the recipient's language usage and affective interactions! Since then the recipient has found the board useful in expressing some of the basic employment-related statements that occur during the day by day operation of the department. However, she has experienced considerable resistance when using the board as a primary communication mode during interdepartmental conferences. She reports that its greatest benefit can be found within the privacy of her own office - she is able to relieve stress by beating out a tattoo with her index finger over certain well-worn symbols!

SYMBOL USERS' CORNER

 
min ønsbedag
My 'Wishing Day'

by: Erik Berggard,
Oslo, Norway

    
jeg vil 'fortelle om min ønsbedag
I want to tell the story of my 'wishing day'.

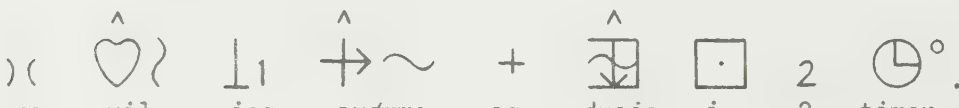
(This award-winning
symbol contribution is
reprinted with permission
from the British Newsletter,
September 1980)

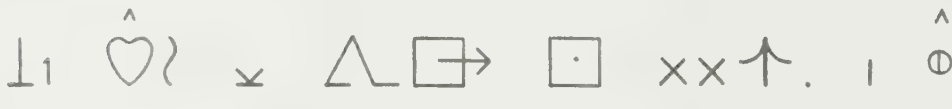
      
den dagen vil jeg ikke pa' skolen.
That day I don't want to go to school.

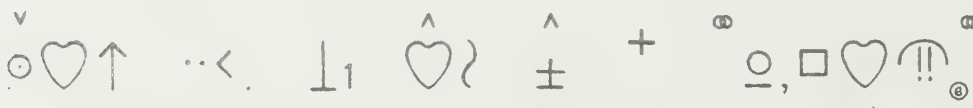

 jeg vil ha frokost på sengen.
 I want to have breakfast in bed.


 jeg vil ha egg og brod med kjøftpålegg
 I want to have egg and bread with 'sausage spread'


 og te. jeg vil stå opp seint
 and tea. I want to get up late.

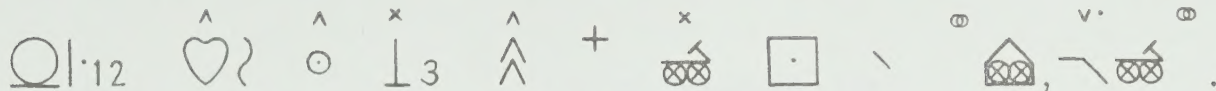

 na vil jeg svømme og dusje i 2 timer.
 Now I want to swim and shower for 2 hours.


 jeg vil på tur i skogen, det er
 I want to go for a walk in the forest, it is


 pent der. jeg vil ha med nve godt
 pretty there. I want to have with me something good to eat


 og varm te.
 and warm tea.


 jeg er veldeg interessert i biler og lastebiler.
 I am very interested in cars and trucks.



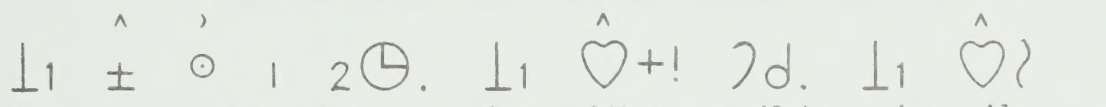
 after mi vil jeg se de jobber med biler i et verlested.

 Afternoon I want to see them working with cars in a garage.



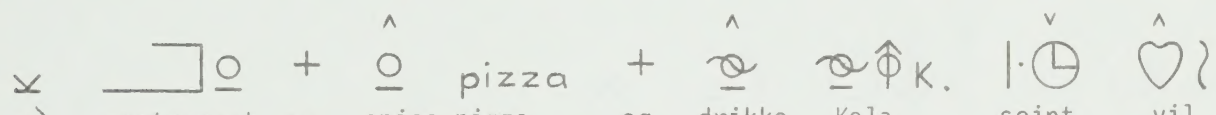
 om kvelden vil jeg på kino og se 'hair'.

 In the evening I want to go to the "cinema" and see 'Hair'.



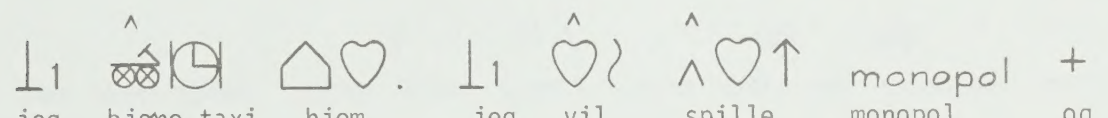
 jeg har sett den 2 ganger. jeg liker musileben. jeg vil

 I have seen it twice. I like the music. I want to go



 på restaurant og spise pizza og drikke Kola. seint vil

 to a restaurant and eat pizza and drink Coke. Later I want



 jeg bjøre taxi hjem. jeg vil spille monopol og

 to drive in a taxi home. I want to play 'Monopoly' and



 jeg vil sove når jeg vil....

 I want to sleep when I like....

Ed. Note

The syntax used in this story is appropriate to Erik's native language, Norwegian. Apologies to Norwegian speakers for any errors in transcription of Norwegian words.

(B) indicates - 1) a symbol which differs from the C.K.Bliss version either in symbol form or accompanying wording, or 2) a new BCI symbol authorized in the absence of requested comment from C. K. Bliss.

Material from symbol users is reproduced essentially as submitted in order to reflect individual creativity and different styles for expression or instruction. Neither symbols nor usage are to be regarded as models for expression or instruction.

The symbol composition and drawing have been updated to conform to Blissymbols For Use.

The Pinewood Derby

from: Home of the Merciful
Saviour
Philadelphia, PA.

$\overset{x}{\perp}_1 \overset{,}{\triangle} 9:00. \overset{x}{\wedge} \overset{,}{\perp}_1 \overset{x}{\perp}_1 \overset{\wedge}{\triangle} \overset{x}{\perp}_1 \overset{x}{\otimes\otimes}. \overset{x}{\perp}_1 \overset{,}{\pm}$
We went (at) 9:00. Daddys helped us make our cars. We had

$\overset{x}{\otimes\otimes} \overset{x}{\rightarrow}. \overset{x}{\wedge} J, \overset{x}{\wedge} B, \overset{x}{\wedge} V, \overset{x}{\wedge} Z, \overset{x}{\wedge} S, \overset{x}{\wedge} M, \overset{x}{\wedge} L,$
(practice) car races. Johnny, Bobby, Vincent, Zach, Shawn, Mike, Larry,

$\overset{x}{\wedge} G, \overset{x}{\wedge} J + \overset{x}{\perp} \overset{,}{\uparrow} \square \overset{,}{\triangle}. \overset{v}{x}$
Gregg, Jimmy and teachers went. (There were) many (Cub Scouts).

$\overset{x}{\perp}_1 -! \overset{\wedge}{\odot} / \overset{x}{\otimes\otimes}. \overset{x}{\otimes\otimes} \overset{,}{\curvearrowright}. \overset{x}{\wedge} B \overset{v}{\heartsuit} \downarrow$
We (could) not (always) see the cars. (Some) cars broke. Bobby (was) sad

$\overset{x}{\wedge} B -! \overset{\wedge}{\rightarrow} +. \overset{x}{\wedge} L \overset{v}{\heartsuit} \downarrow (?) / \times \times \square. \overset{x}{\wedge} B \overset{,}{\heartsuit} +!$
(when) he did not win. Larry (was) afraid (of) the city. Bobby liked

$\overset{\wedge}{\odot} \overset{x}{\wedge} B + \overset{x}{\otimes\otimes} / = / \overset{x}{\otimes\otimes}.$
to see (that) his car (looked) the same (as) the (other) cars.

$\overset{x}{\wedge} J \overset{,}{\heartsuit} +! \overset{\wedge}{\odot} / \overset{x}{\rightarrow}.$
Johnny liked to see the races.

Note: Although the combine strategy is sometimes employed to arrive at new symbol expressions, the personal symbol creation is often not enclosed between combine indicators as required by BCI practice.

